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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to develop an innovative model for introducing elementary school children to the critical, less commonly taught languages of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean by using international parents as teachers. A three-step plan was implemented over the period of a school year: (1) native speakers who were doctoral students in language education, established and taught Chinese, Japanese, and Korean classes in the fall; (2) language classes were professionally videotaped and the tapes used to train parent volunteers; and (3) parents attended training seminars do they could take over the classes gradually. The study examined which teaching techniques and activities were most effective in promoting language learning, students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language and culture, student achievement, and the international parents' attitudes toward the teaching experience in an American school. Results are outlined and implications for international parent involvement in language teaching are discussed briefly. Appended materials include a videotape viewing checklist, sample student group interview questions concerning the language learning experience, categories and examples for coding teaching techniques on the videotapes, and class schedules and student characteristics. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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ED 408 861

Parents as Teachers: The Development of a Parent Involvement Model for Teaching Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in the Elementary School

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Parents as Teachers: The Development of a Parent Involvement Model for Teaching Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in the Elementary School

With an increasing number of people from other countries moving to America, educators and administrators must work to find ways to welcome and accomodate the needs of diverse populations of students. Yet the struggles and problems involved in this process are more than matched by its rewards. Within multicultural school populations, for example, students learn easily from one another as they engage naturally in shared intercultural experiences. Obviously, this process is invaluable in today's expanding multicultural world. We have, however, as yet failed to tap into another potent community and educational resource: the international parent. International parents often do not get involved in their childrens' schools because of language barriers or different cultural perceptions about the nature of parental involvement. One way to bridge this gap is to engage parents as foreign language teachers in the schools. The benefits of this approach are twofold: students gain first-hand language knowledge from a native speaker, and, in turn, the culture of the parents becomes a valuable asset to an understanding of the language. Equally important, intercultural communication and relationships built in the schools expand inevitably, and effectively, into the community at large.

Related Studies

Parental involvement has been usually understood to mean parents volunteering their time to participate in school activites and taking an active part in their children's learning. The Conrad Public School System in Montana, for example,

created a model in which parents and teachers were trained to work as collaborators with complementary sets of responsibilities. In this setting, the parents became advisors, learners, and teachers (Conrad Public Schools 1989). Other home-school partnership programs have focused on the earlier years of child development before the children enter school. Projects of this sort are designed to exploit the fact that children learn more during their first few years than at any other time, and also that parents are the first teachers of their children. Therefore, in addition to the scheduled developmental screening tests for the children that focus on language, cognitive, social, and motor skill development, these programs include home visits and group meetings for the parents (Hausman 1989; Ehlers and Ruffin 1990; Rayborn 1993). The initiative that led to the creation of home-school partnerships with a focus on the parents as the initial teachers, and the renewed concentration on the earlier stages of child development prior to the school years, show that there is a growing concern to involve parents in the education of their children.

Home-school partnerships specifically designed for international parents are becoming increasingly necessary; school districts and state departments create handbooks with suggestions and model programs aimed at involving international parents in the schools. The California State Department of Education, for example, has developed various parent training programs to help international parents understand the school system and take part in their children's learning. Parents are taught tutoring skills and given home learning activities. In addition, these programs train educators to be better prepared to collaborate with international parents in home-school partnerships (Ramirez 1989). In Chicago, the project Family Literacy: *Aprendiendo,*

Mejorando, Educando (Learning, Bettering, Educating), or Project FLAME, was designed to provide adult literacy training for the parents. By educating the parents and building confidence in their own reading and writing skills, the project promotes more supportive home learning environments for the children (Shanahan, Mulhern, and Rodriguez-Brown 1995). Partnerships can also be instrumental in providing opportunities for international parents to maintain their culture and traditions when schools reach out to parents and express interest in and respect for the parents' different ethnic origin and cultural background by inviting them to take part in classroom activities (Pecoraro 1991). For instance, during a social studies lesson on China, Chinese parents could be in charge of a unit on their country's customs, food, and folklore, or during art class, Japanese parents could illustrate their country's origami. In case communication problems arise, schools can invite international parents who know some English to act as interpreters for other parents and to help bridge the communication gap between home and school (Bermudez 1994). Thus, there is a variety of ways to involve international parents in the schools in order to support them in their parental role and to celebrate their native cultures within the American society.

One dynamic way to build a home-school relationship with international parents is to utilize their competence as native speakers and to invite them to teach their own native languages. However, few projects have involved parents as official language teachers. The Madison School District in Phoenix, Arizona, is one of the select school systems that have developed a program in which parent volunteers taught their native language - Spanish in this case. While parents in the community strongly supported

foreign language study, financial constraints allowed for only a small program in each school, but the district, nevertheless, succeeded in recruiting parent volunteers who were then prepared in the rudiments of foreign language teaching (Acquafredda 1993).

Aim of Study

The main goal of our study was to develop an innovative model for introducing elementary school children to the critical, less commonly taught languages of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean by employing international parents as teachers. In order to realize this goal, we formulated a three-step plan that was implemented over a school year. First, native speakers, who were doctoral students in language education at a large state university, established and taught Chinese, Japanese, and Korean classes in the fall. Second, the language classes were professionally videotaped, and the tapes were used to train the parent volunteers. Third, the parents attended training seminars so that they could gradually take over the language classes.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the parent involvement model, the following research questions were addressed:

- What teaching techniques and activities were the most effective in promoting the learning of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean?
- What were the students' attitudes have toward learning a foreign language and its culture?
- What were the students able to learn?
- Did being an international parent affect the parent's attitudes toward the teaching experience in an American school?

Design of Study

Setting

The study was conducted at an elementary school within walking distance of a large state university in a city with a population of 89,000. The school was designated as one of two schools in the district to offer ESOL instruction. Forty-one percent of the students were African Americans, 29% were whites, 15% were Asians, 13% were Hispanics, and 2% were of other ethnic origins. Thirteen languages were spoken in the school which had a total enrollment of 382 students.

Subjects

As shown in Table 1, forty- seven students from grades one to four were chosen by their teachers to participate in the program. The teachers confirmed that the students selected represented a good cross-section of the school population in terms of ability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. Table 1 shows the gender and grade breakdown of the participants.

Insert **Table 1** about here

Developing the Model

During the first stage of the project, we set up a schedule - see Table 2 - for the foreign language classes to be taught by the doctoral students, and we collected data through class observations, student interviews, and parent questionnaires.

Insert **Table 2** about here

During the second stage, while language instruction proceeded according to the syllabus outline, a professional camera crew videotaped the classes over a two-week period. The videotaping was done in the students' regular classrooms. The tapes were not heavily edited after the initial recording. Topics of the taped lessons included greetings, months and seasons, directions, shapes and colors, and daily routines.[1]

Also during the second stage of the project we conducted a search for the parent teachers. We sent a letter to the international parents of the school inviting them to apply if they were interested in becoming teachers of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The remuneration for teaching one or two classes over a period of ten weeks was to be $1,000. After receiving letters from interested parents, the project directors and classroom teachers formed a committee to choose the most promising candidates.

In the third and main stage of the project, the parents were trained to take over the teaching of the language classes. The training sessions revolved around the following topics.

- First, we discussed the most up-to-date foreign language teaching practices for children. These formed the theoretical basis of our program. Some of these practices are listed below (Curtain and Pesola 1994: xiii-xiv).
  - Children learn languages best when their native language is not used for instruction.
  - Comprehension precedes speaking in the beginning stages.

- Successful language learning for children is organized in terms of concrete experiences; considerable planning should go into the use of visuals, props and realia, and hands-on activities involving arts and crafts.
- Successful language learning activities for children incorporate opportunities for movement and physical activity.
- Teachers should use linguistic modifications to make the target language more comprehensible for students in the beginning stages. Some of these are: controlled sentence length and complexity; slower speech rate (but not distorted); and the use of restatement, expansion, and repetition.
- Teachers should draw classroom techniques primarily from elementary school methodology.

• The videotapes of our sample lessons of first, second, third, and fourth grade classes learning Chinese, Japanese, and Korean were used to train the prospective parent teachers of these languages. To provide guidance for the viewing of the videotapes, the parents were given a checklist of teaching strategies. (See Appendix A.)

Videotapes are a singularly useful tool for teacher training: they can be played back as many times as the parent wishes to observe a teaching technique and the children's response to it; the parent can concentrate on the language in detail as well as on essential nonverbal clues to meaning such as facial expression and gestures; and, if the same lesson is taught in classes composed of students from different grade

levels (as was the case with the Japanese and Korean videos, which showed second and fourth grade, and first and third students, respectively), the parent can see whether or not certain lessons and approaches are more effective with different age groups.

- Several of the training sessions were devoted to discussing ways to establish the optimum climate for successful learning; many of the ideas came from *Discipline with Dignity* (Curwin and Mendler 1988). The parents also visited classes of teachers noted for their success in creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. After the class visitations, the parents and project directors analyzed the various techniques and approaches observed.

Following the training sessions, the parent teachers began team-teaching with the doctoral students to become acquainted with their students and their teaching duties. Under the guidance of the project directors and doctoral students, the parent teachers gradually took over the classes and taught for five weeks. Although the doctoral students remained in the classroom to provide assistance, they had relinguished their roles as primary teachers to function mainly as teacher aids.

Data Collection

To determine the effectiveness of the parent model, triangulation of qualitative methods was used for the collection of data. These methods included class observations, student group interviews, and parent teacher interviews and reflection journals. For the observations, we took field notes in each class at least once a week. To gather students' input, we developed open-ended interview questions that reflected the research questions - see Appendix B - and interviewed the students in groups of three or four over a two week period. To capture the parent teachers' input, we

interviewed the parent teachers and asked them to record their perceptions and thoughts about the project and their teaching experiences in reflection journals.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to process the student interview data (Patton, 1990). After transcription, we read the interviews to identify recurring patterns in order to code the data and establish categories of responses. (See Appendix C). The same approach was used to analyze the field notes from the class observations and the interviews and reflection journals of the parent teachers.

Findings

The following describes the principal findings from the cross-analysis of the student group interviews, class observations, and parent teacher interviews and reflection journals. The quotes which follow the research questions are representative of the complete body of data.

1) What teaching techniques and activities were the most effective in promoting the learning of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean?

The most effective techniques and activities used by the parent teachers can be subsumed under the following four categories: modifying the lesson, using concrete materials, planning meaningful communicative contexts, and rewarding students.

Modifying the lesson includes such strategies as repeating words or phrases, speaking more slowly, using English when necessary, or giving individual assistance. For example, one student stated, "She makes it easier by saying the words very clearly and slowly." The use of concrete materials also helped the students learn. Concrete materials included realia, props, and visuals such as food and items of clothing, stuffed

animals or a globe, and illustrations of seasons and family members. One parent teacher reported that "visuals, realia, and physical activity are enough for teaching concrete objects." A student also emphasized the importance of visuals: "She will show us the pictures of farm animals so we will know what we are looking at and talking about."

Meaningful contexts which encouraged students to use the language were created by using songs, rhymes, games, and hands-on activities. "She makes up a song like 'Head, shoulders, knees and toes' so we can learn," reported one student. Another student said, "When we get to play games, we get to put our hands over our heads and she puts a card into our fingers and we have to guess what it is. That's how we learn the names of things in Japanese." In addition, the students often stated that rewarding them with stickers, treats, and privileges helped them learn. "If we say the right word she has a treat for us," claimed a student.

2) What were the students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language and its culture?

Students' attitudes fell into the following three categories: eagerness to share their knowledge with others, interest in using words and phrases of the foreign language to interact with native speakers of the language, and appreciation of the opportunity to learn a new language.

Students often mentioned their desire to share their new knowledge with others, particularly with family members. For instance, one student explained, "I really like learning it because I can teach it to my family. I taught my dad how to say 'good afternoon' in Korean." Another student expressed an eagerness to impress friends

with the new language: "I say Chinese at my house when my friends come over. Instead of saying 'thank you,'I say '*xie xie* ,'' then I tell them what I mean."

More importantly, the students recognized opportunities to interact with native speakers. "I made a new friend from Japan, and now I can communicate with him," exclaimed one student. Students also realized that their new knowledge could help others: "I like most learning this language because we get to help other kids that just came to (our school) with their school work and stuff."

Given the exclusive nature of the foreign language program, students also acknowledged their appreciation for the opportunity to participate. "I feel lucky to be learning Japanese because only fifty students were picked for foreign language," declared a student. Another student proclaimed, "I feel proud of learning a new language."

3) What were the students able to learn?

The following five categories represent what the students learned: everyday expressions, words grouped around different topics, written characters of the language, cultural aspects of a particular country, and acceptance of others different from themselves.

Students learned important everyday phrases such as greetings, requests, and expressions of gratitude. One student stated, "I like it because we learn everyday life words like our names, 'hello,' 'good bye,' and 'What is this?'" Students also learned sets of words for animals, food items, numbers, months of the year, and family members: "We learn the fruits and vegetables and different animals."

The students learned how to write their names using the characters of the

Asian languages. Parent teachers introduced students to various cultural aspects of their native countries: they brought in native food and clothing; they taught the students native songs, rhymes, and stories; and they engaged the students in cultural activities such as origami, paper-cutting, and the performing of tea ceremonies. Becoming familiar with the written and spoken language and the culture of the countries influenced students' perceptions of the native speakers. One student's comment illustrates a greater acceptance of others: "They are just like us on the inside and outside. They just have a different language."

4) Did being an international parent affect the parent's attitudes toward the teaching experience in an American school?

In their interview responses and journal entries, the three international parents expressed a sense of relief after the initial contact with their students was behind them. They had heard that students in American schools were very active, that they would freely ask many questions, and that they would usually talk out of turn. However, the parents were pleasantly surprised when they discovered that their students did raise their hands when they wanted to say something. Furthermore, they found that their students worked well together in groups. They were surprised by this spirit of cooperation, for students in their own countries tend to be much more competitive and do not like to share knowledge. One parent was struck by the fact that African American and white children worked harmoniously with each other in class. This parent stated: "I guess racial problems come later when children get older."

The international parents definitely felt that being parents played a significant role in their classroom experiences. One parent, for example, felt she had learned a

lot about American schools from listening to her seven-year-old daughter's friends, who frequently came to her house, talking about what books they read, what games they liked to play, and what television programs they watched. According to the parent: "I felt I was a better teacher because I knew where my students were coming from, what they thought about things, and what they had done before I got them in class."

As a parent, another teacher indicated that she was always interested in knowing about what her child was doing in school. She, therefore, tried to keep her students' parents informed about and involved in the activities in her own classroom. She had learned this lesson earlier when, not yet a mother, she had taught at a commercial English school in her native country. If the parents were not satisfied with the English instruction their child was receiving - being satisfied meant to a large extent being informed about the class - they withdrew their child from school. So this time, in America, the teacher sent home notes and lessons with her students. In one instance, she included a song text which also contained the musical notation for the song, and one parent was delighted that she could play the song on the piano and help her daughter learn the foreign language words. This same parent teacher pointed out that she also had a good store of authentic childrens' songs, games, and finger plays that she had taught her son. As a teacher in the project, she was readily able to make use of these in her lessons.

According to all three of the international parents, being a parent helped to develop a higher degree of tolerance toward student behavior. As one of the teachers stated: " When I was single and if a child misbehaved, I thought that the child was bad;

but now as a mother, my heart is more generous. I try to figure out why students are making mistakes and adjust my approach to the lesson. I also try to be fair, because the unruly student could be my son, and I want my son to be treated fairly."

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study clearly underscore the benefits of utilizing international parents as foreign language teachers. Interestingly, the findings concerning effective teaching techniques support close adherence to the foreign language learning practices that were used a basis for the training seminars - cf. pp. 7 - 8. They confirm that activities should be structured to dovetail with the students' developmental levels; the modifications made by the parent teachers in order to facilitate the students' language learning reflect this key concept. Furthermore, language learning is more successful when lessons are organized around concrete experiences through songs, hands-on activities, and realia. Although the reward strategy is not highlighted as a key concept of foreign language learning, educators have always used positive reinforcement as a technique for motivating students.

The students' enthusiasm in learning a new language and culture is evident not only in their expressions of appreciation for having the opportunity, but also in their attempts to share their knowledge and interact with native speakers. Students indicated that their lives had been enriched, because they had acquired some proficiency in a second language. Sometimes, their comments reflected a sense of pride whereby they wished to impress friends and family with new words. But they also recognized the concrete benefits of knowing another language: being able to communicate with foreign language speakers at school and in their neighborhood

was perceived as important, especially when someone needed help.

It is illuminating to consider the teaching of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean within the broader context of foreign language education in the United States. According to Walton (1992), one of the trends in foreign language instruction during the last 15 years has been an increase in the teaching of the less commonly taught languages (LCTL) at all levels of education. LCTLs generally include those languages other than French, German, and Spanish that are politically and economically important to the United States. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean definitely belong to this group, for they are spoken in countries that have crucial political and economic ties with our country. At least two of these languages - Chinese and Japanese - are major world languages, for they are included in the top ten most frequently spoken languages. All three languages are important to the United States for another reason: they are spoken by influential minority groups living within our borders. According to the l990 U.S. Census (Bialystok and Hakuta 1994: 190-91), 14 percent of the total population speak languages other than English at home. In this group there are 1,319,462 speakers of Chinese, 427,657 speakers of Japanese, and 626,478 speakers of Korean. (These figures are undoubtedly higher today.) Thus, by virtue of the number of U.S. residents speaking the languages represented in this study, it seems reasonable to offer instruction in these three Asian languages in our schools.

Although there is a trend to expand instruction in the LCTCs, finding qualified teachers is a major challenge, since there are not many teacher education programs for individuals wishing to become certified to teach Asian languages (Brecht and

Walton 1993). The project described here offers a viable solution to the immediate problem of staffing LCTC courses in our schools. Educated native speaker parents already possess the requiste linquistic and cultural expertise and are generally familiar with the American education system, since their children attend school here. If we, therefore, screen carefully the pool of available native speaker parents, we can identify prospective candidates who, with the appropriate pedagogical training, can help fill the void in LCTC instruction in our schools.

Conclusion

Using international parents as teachers of the less commonly taught foreign languages brings many advantages to the classroom. Such parents have a unique perspective on language teaching, for they are native speakers and authentic representatives of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean culture. They realize that foreign language study is important for America; for through such study students have a chance to develop an appreciation of and respect for other ethnic groups and cultures. If our country is to succeed as a harmonious multicultural society in the twenty-first century, it is imperative for us to gain respect and tolerance for the views and cultural patterns of minority groups living within our borders. One parent underscored this point by stating: "Many Americans are not aware of other countries and traditions. They think America is the center of the world. Learning a foreign language [should] not become just a piece of memory; maybe [this knowledge] will affect students' lives and the way they think about the world as adults."

The parents in the project are members of minority groups living in America and will probably remain here for an extended period of time. The opportunity to perform as

a teacher, provided them with the means to become significantly involved in what is for them a new society; and since their own children attend American schools, they have a vested interest in contributing to a school's curriculum by helping to expand and improve it.

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Notes

1. These videotapes are available to schools wishing to use them to start their own Chinese, Japanese, or Korean programs. Please contact T. Cooper , Department of Language Education, Aderhold Hall R. 125, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

Appendix A

Videotape Viewing Checklist

- Instructional techniques and activities of the teacher
  1. Use of the target language
  2. Use of visuals, realia, and props to make the lesson concrete
  3. Use of hands-on activities
  4. Use of craft activities
  5. Use of songs and rhymes
  6. Incorporating physical activity into the lesson: for example, Total Physical Response techniques, dances, and games
- Management techniques used by the teacher
  1. To start and end the class
  2. To elicit student responses
  3. To encourage turn-taking
  4. To reinforce and encourage the students
  5. To deal with disruptive behavior
  6. To keep students on task
  7. To clarify or explain if students do not understand
- Overall view of the lesson
  1. Was the lesson clear?
  2. Were the students interested?

3. Did the lesson have a communicative emphasis/

Appendix B

Sample Student Group Interview Questions

1. What do you like most about learning a foreign language?
2. What lesson do you enjoy the most and why?
3. What does your foreign language teacher do to help you learn the language?
4. What does your foreign language teacher do to make the lesson fun and interesting?
5. What could your foreign language teacher do to help you learn better or to make the class more interesting?
6. What have you learned in your foreign language class?
7. What is easy to learn?
8. What is difficult to learn?
9. How do you feel about being able to learn a foreign language?
10. Have you been able to use your new language outside the classroom? If so, how?

Appendix C

Samples of Coding Categories and Example Student Responses

	Codes	Example Responses
Strategies	Modifying the lesson	*"She first tells us in Chinese then she tells us in English."*
		"I like it because she acts it out so we really know what she means."
	Planning meaningful communicative contexts	*"The songs are helpful because it has lots of Chinese words in it."*
	Concrete materials	*"I like when we use those cups and those strings and make phones."*
		"The teacher brings umbrellas and scarves. She says something in Chinese and we pick it up."
	Rewarding students	*"The teacher gives us some stickers and candy when we are good."*
Attitudes	Appreciation of the opportunity	*"I enjoy being in this class and accomplishing everything we*

		have and it helps me learn a lot."
	Willingness to share knowledge with others	*"I'm real happy taking Korean and teaching other people about it who wants to know."*
	Willingness to interact with native speakers	*"I like learning a new language because I can speak to other students that go to my school."* *"Someday I want to travel to Korea and talk to them and ask them questions."*
Knowledge	Everyday sayings	*"The first thing we learned was his name and how to say ours."*
	Classifications	*"I like learning new words such as materials we use in school - things like pencil and eraser."* *"We have been studying about body parts ... like knees and other parts."*
	Culture	*"I learned we have different cultures than them."* *"We get to do a lot of Chinese things."*
	Written characters	*"I like to write ... I love to write in*

class."

TABLE 2
Foreign Language Class Schedule

	Korean		Japanese		Chinese
Day	1st grade	3rd grade	2nd grade	4th grade	1st grade
Monday					12:10-12:35
Tuesday	11:00-11:30	11:35-12:05	12:40-1:10	9:30-10:00	12:10-12:35
Wednesday					12:10-12:35
Thursday	11:00-11:30	11:35-12:05	12:40-1:10	9:30-10:00	12:10-12:35
Friday	11:00-11:30	11:35-12:05	12:40-1:10	9:30-10:00	12:10-12:35

TABLE 1
Students Participating in the Study

Grade	Boys	Girls
First Grade	6	9
Second Grade	3	6
Third Grade	4	6
Fourth Grade	7	6
TOTAL	20	27